Investigating the Impact of Multiple Strategic Orientations and Strategic Flexibility on Product Innovation (Case Study: Knowledge-Based Companies in Kerman City)

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to investigate the impact of multiple strategic orientations (entrepreneurial orientation and learning orientation) and strategic flexibility (coordination flexibility and resource flexibility) on product innovation in knowledge-based companies located in Kerman city. This research, in terms of methodology, is a descriptive-survey study (utilizing a standardized questionnaire), and in terms of purpose, it is applied research. The statistical population of this study includes all CEOs, financial managers, marketing managers, and production managers of knowledge-based companies situated in the Science and Technology Park of Kerman Province in the year 2022. The sampling method was purposive. The reliability of the aforementioned questionnaire was estimated at 0.904, and its content validity was confirmed by experts and academics. A total of 260 responses were collected through in-person surveys and were then analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. For data analysis, SPSS version 24 and PLS version 3 software were employed. Our findings indicated that entrepreneurial orientation has a significant impact on learning orientation, coordination flexibility, and product innovation in knowledge-based companies. Moreover, learning orientation has a positive effect on coordination flexibility and product innovation. Additionally, the moderating role of resource flexibility in the relationship between coordination flexibility and product innovation was confirmed. Ultimately, coordination flexibility and learning orientation mediate the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and product innovation. Based on the findings of this study, it is possible to identify the factors that influence product innovation under the current competitive conditions.

Keywords: *entrepreneurial orientation, learning orientation, coordination flexibility, resource flexibility, product innovation, knowledge-based companies, Kerman city.*

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1. Introduction

In today's increasingly dynamic and unpredictable market environment, firms are under mounting pressure to remain agile, innovate continuously, and respond strategically to shifts in consumer preferences, technological advances, and competitive landscapes. Within this context, strategic orientation has emerged as a crucial determinant of organizational performance and long-term sustainability. Among the various strategic orientations, entrepreneurial orientation and learning orientation have received significant scholarly attention for their central role in fostering innovation and adaptability in organizations [1, 2]. Entrepreneurial orientation, which captures a firm's proclivity for innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking, has been consistently associated with enhanced product innovation outcomes [3]. Likewise, learning orientation, defined by a firm's commitment to learning, shared vision,

and open-mindedness, enables continuous capability development and facilitates both radical and incremental innovation [4].

Strategic flexibility, often conceptualized as the firm's ability to adapt and reconfigure its internal resources and processes in response to environmental changes, complements these orientations by providing the structural and procedural agility needed to implement innovative strategies effectively [5]. Strategic flexibility includes two critical dimensions: coordination flexibility and resource flexibility. Coordination flexibility refers to a firm's ability to orchestrate its internal processes and functions in a responsive and synchronized manner, while resource flexibility concerns the reallocation and adaptation of firm resources for new opportunities [5]. When aligned with entrepreneurial and learning orientations, strategic flexibility is believed to amplify the firm's innovation capability by facilitating the effective transformation of strategic intent into tangible product development outcomes [6].

The integration of multiple strategic orientations is essential in contemporary innovation strategies. While each orientation contributes uniquely to firm performance, recent research has emphasized the synergetic effects that occur when entrepreneurial and learning orientations coexist within a firm's strategic framework [7]. Entrepreneurial orientation drives the identification and pursuit of novel opportunities, whereas learning orientation supports the assimilation of new knowledge and continuous improvement [8]. This complementary relationship has been empirically shown to produce more robust innovation outcomes, especially in competitive and technologically advanced industries [9]. Therefore, exploring the dynamic interaction between these strategic orientations and their combined influence on innovation performance remains an important area of inquiry.

In emerging markets, the interplay of strategic orientations and flexibility becomes even more critical due to resource constraints, regulatory volatility, and institutional uncertainties [10, 11]. Firms in such contexts must not only be opportunistic and proactive but also capable of learning rapidly and adjusting their strategies accordingly. The relevance of strategic flexibility in these environments is underscored by its role in helping organizations cope with ambiguity and align internal capabilities with fast-changing external demands [12]. Empirical studies suggest that resource and coordination flexibility mediate the effects of strategic orientations on innovation performance, highlighting the importance of these capabilities in enabling the operationalization of strategic goals [5, 13].

In the Iranian context, particularly within the ecosystem of knowledge-based firms operating in science and technology parks, strategic orientation and flexibility are indispensable for maintaining competitive advantage and innovation. These firms often rely on R&D-driven strategies, face financial and infrastructural limitations, and must remain agile in response to policy and market fluctuations. Previous studies in Iran have indicated that internal marketing, organizational culture, and strategic learning play significant roles in shaping the performance of startups and SMEs [14, 15]. In this regard, strategic orientations such as entrepreneurial and learning orientation can empower firms to navigate turbulent environments and pursue product innovation more effectively.

Moreover, as digital transformation accelerates, strategic orientations are increasingly linked to a firm's digital readiness and ambidexterity, particularly within the framework of Industry 4.0 [11]. The adoption of digital technologies requires not only technical capability but also strategic foresight and learning aptitude. Firms that strategically align entrepreneurial vision with organizational learning structures are better positioned to develop high-value, technology-enabled innovations. These firms demonstrate an enhanced capacity to experiment, absorb external knowledge, and transform digital opportunities into marketable products and services [16]. This intersection of digital strategy and innovation orientation necessitates a multidimensional approach to studying firm behavior, particularly in developing economies with nascent innovation ecosystems.

Despite the growing literature on strategic orientation and flexibility, relatively few studies have examined their joint impact on product innovation in the context of Iranian knowledge-based firms. A gap remains in understanding how entrepreneurial and learning orientations, mediated by strategic flexibility, contribute to innovation performance in firms that are resource-constrained yet innovation-driven. Furthermore, little is known about how these relationships manifest in specific local ecosystems, such as Kerman's science and technology park, which features unique cultural, institutional, and industrial dynamics. By addressing this gap, the present study aims to develop a structural model that evaluates the direct and indirect effects of multiple strategic orientations and strategic flexibility on product innovation in knowledge-based companies in Kerman.

Specifically, this research investigates: (1) the direct impact of entrepreneurial orientation on learning orientation, coordination flexibility, and product innovation; (2) the influence of learning orientation on coordination flexibility and product innovation; and (3) the mediating roles of coordination and resource flexibility in shaping the relationship between strategic orientations and product innovation.

2. Methodology

This research is applied in terms of its purpose and is classified as a descriptive-survey study because it aims to describe the current situation of the target population through a field survey. In order to collect data and assess various dimensions of the model, a questionnaire was used as the primary research instrument. The statistical population of this study consists of CEOs, financial managers, marketing managers, and production managers of knowledge-based companies located in the Science and Technology Park of Kerman Province in the year 2022. Among these knowledge-based companies, firms with a certain level of research and development and innovation flexibility were selected as the statistical sample. Considering the limited population, a cluster sampling method was employed. Due to the known and accessible nature of the target population, a total of 260 questionnaires were distributed among the members with high sensitivity. Out of the distributed questionnaires, 260 were returned and all were deemed valid for analysis.

A five-point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire. Since the study utilized the standardized questionnaire developed by Han and Zhang (2021), there was no need to revalidate its content. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire in the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated using SPSS software. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients and the source of the questions for each variable are presented separately in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability Coefficients of Research Variables

Question Numbers	Variable Name	Cronbach's Alpha
1–10	Entrepreneurial Orientation	0.843
11–24	Learning Orientation	0.937
25–29	Coordination Flexibility	0.852
30–33	Product Innovation	0.792
34–37	Resource Flexibility	0.841

The overall Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was calculated as 0.904. Since all values exceed 0.70, it can be concluded that the questionnaire possesses acceptable reliability. To test the hypotheses and assess the fit of the proposed model, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) were conducted using PLS3 software.

3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the research sample, including gender, age, and education level, are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Descriptive Status	Percentage	Frequency
Female	48.5%	124
Gender		
Male	51.5%	136
Below diploma/diploma	19.6%	51
Bachelor's degree	29.6%	77
Master's degree	43.1%	112
Doctorate	7.7%	20
Under 18 years old	20%	52
Age		
19–29 years	28.1%	73
30–49 years	26.9%	70
Over 50 years	25%	65

Based on the demographic findings, the majority of the statistical population in terms of gender, age, and educational attainment are top managers of knowledge-based companies, predominantly male, aged between 19 and 29 years, and holding a master's degree. To examine the normality of the data in Smart PLS 3 software, skewness and kurtosis were analyzed. If the skewness and kurtosis values fall within the range of -3 to +3, the data are considered normal; otherwise, they are considered non-normal. The skewness and kurtosis results for the data from the managers of knowledge-based companies are presented separately in Table 3.

Table 3. Normality Assessment of Variables Using PLS Software

Question	Skewness	Kurtosis	Question	Skewness	Kurtosis
Q1	0.402	0.518	Q20	0.591	-0.550
Q2	0.493	0.587	Q21	1.037	1.817
Q3	0.413	0.501	Q22	0.634	0.483
Q4	0.762	0.385	Q23	0.543	0.131
Q5	0.620	0.331	Q24	0.549	-0.571
Q6	0.567	0.148	Q25	0.563	0.232
Q7	0.623	0.404	Q26	0.557	0.161
Q8	0.564	0.240	Q27	0.562	0.124
Q9	0.601	0.332	Q28	0.380	-0.376
Q10	0.549	0.141	Q29	0.269	0.492
Q11	0.613	0.240	Q30	0.384	-0.138
Q12	1.065	1.224	Q31	0.452	-0.197
Q13	1.354	1.432	Q32	0.314	-0.673
Q14	1.332	1.910	Q33	0.302	0.294
Q15	0.773	0.662	Q34	0.686	0.132
Q16	0.982	0.546	Q35	0.559	0.841
Q17	0.745	0.205	Q36	0.862	0.324
Q18	0.188	-0.600	Q37	1.400	1.862
Q19	0.411	-0.756	Q38	0.653	0.783

To assess the measurement model's fit, three indicators are used: indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Holland, 1999). To calculate indicator reliability, the overall model including all constructs and items was executed in Smart PLS 3 software. The results, containing standardized coefficients, are shown in Figure 1. As illustrated in the figure, all item factor loadings are above 0.40, indicating that there is no need to remove any items.

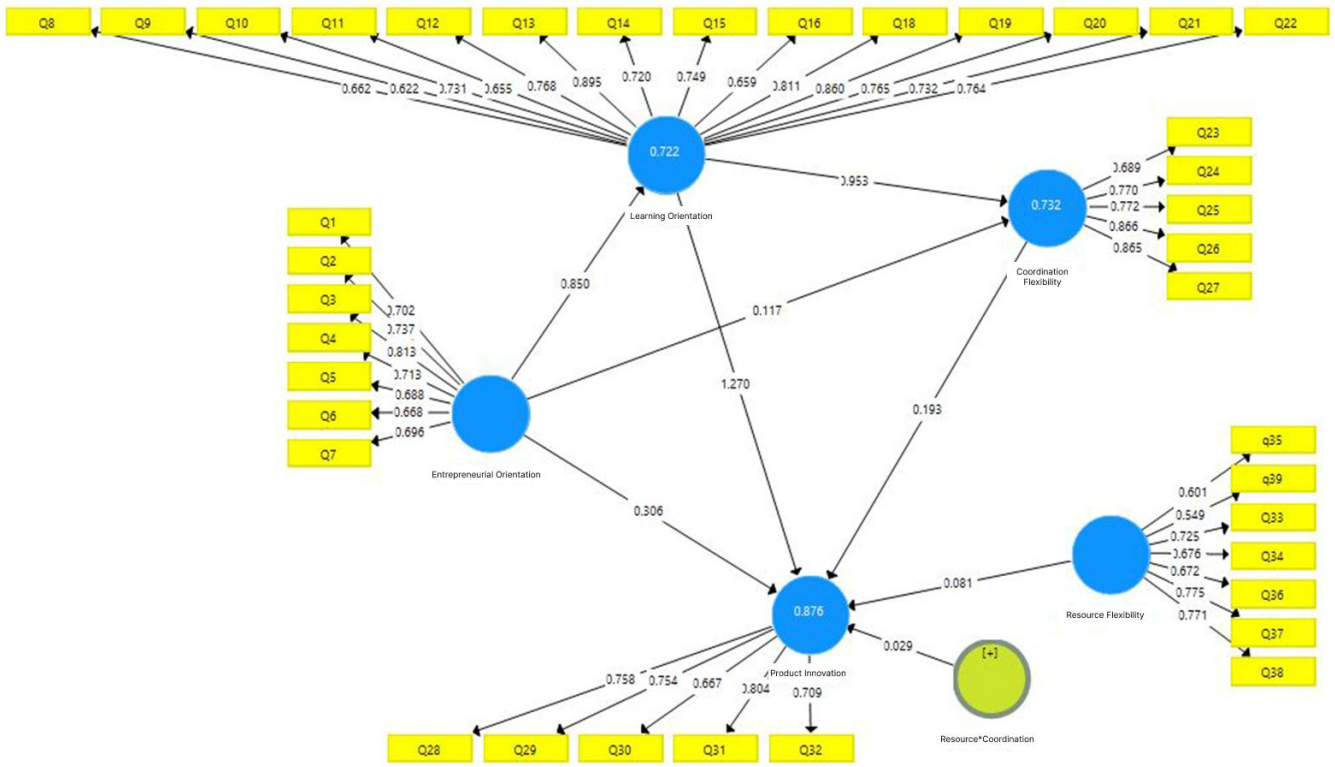

Figure 1. Research Model with Standardized Coefficients

Therefore, the first criterion—indicator reliability (factor loadings)—is satisfactorily met. For the second and third criteria (convergent and discriminant validity), the output of Smart PLS 3 for the main constructs of the model is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Convergent and Discriminant Validity for Research Variables

Dimension	AVE	Composite Reliability (CR)
Entrepreneurial Orientation	0.516	0.881
Learning Orientation	0.557	0.946
Coordination Flexibility	0.632	0.892
Resource Flexibility	0.559	0.882
Product Innovation	0.547	0.858

To evaluate the structural model's fit, the significance (t-values) of the path coefficients are examined. The most basic criterion for assessing relationships between constructs in the structural model is the t-statistic. If the t-value exceeds 1.96, it indicates the validity of the relationship between constructs and supports the research hypotheses. Figure 2 displays the t-values of the relationships between the research constructs. As shown in the figure, t-values greater than 1.96 confirm both the research hypotheses and the structural model's fit.

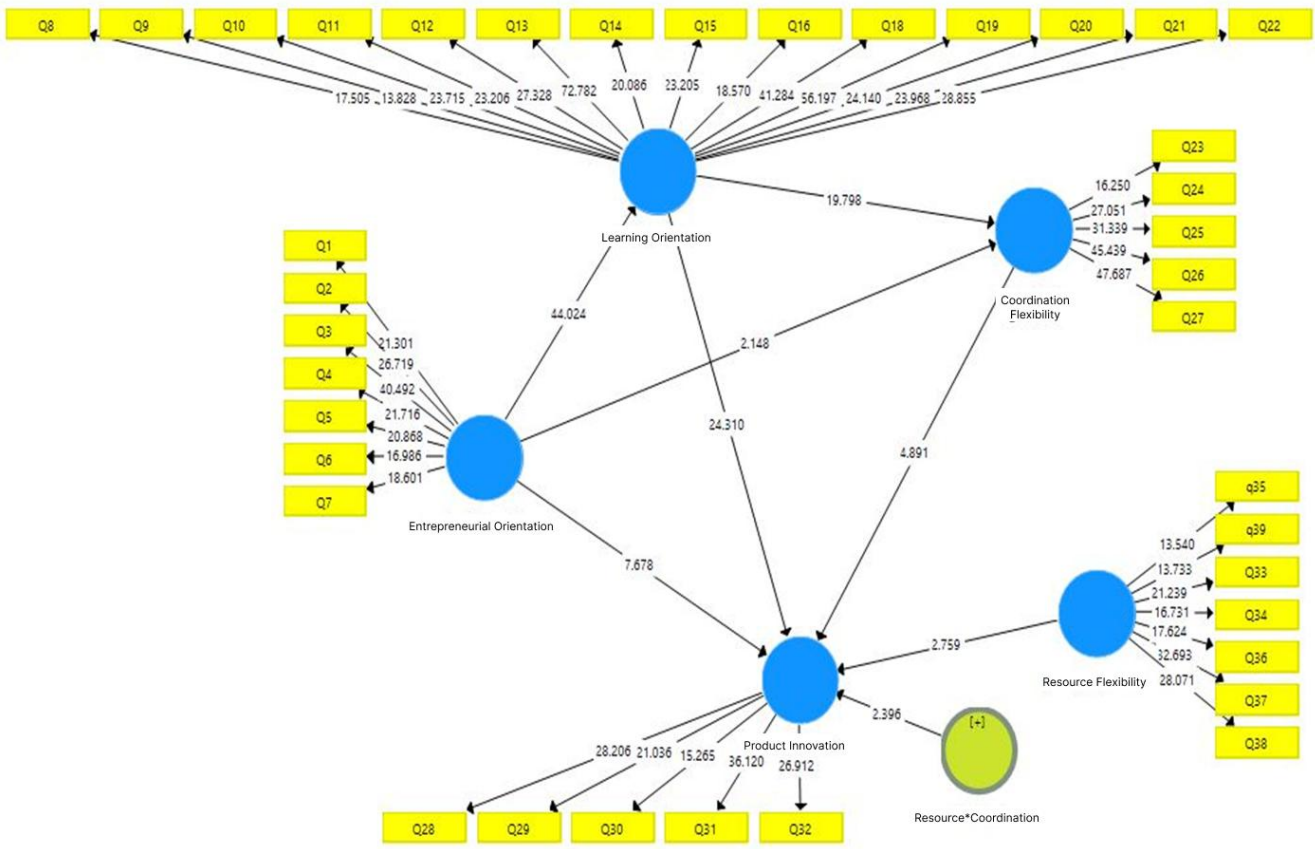

Figure 2. Research Model Showing Significance of Coefficients (t-values)

After assessing the model fit, we proceed to test the research hypotheses. The significance of path coefficients is determined using the t-statistic. If the t-value is greater than 1.96, the corresponding path is considered statistically significant and the hypothesis is confirmed; otherwise, it is rejected. The results of the hypothesis testing based on the path coefficient, t-value, and significance level—presented in Figure 2—are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results Using PLS Software

Path	Path Coefficient	t-value	Result
Hypothesis 1: Entrepreneurial Orientation → Product Innovation	0.306	7.678	Confirmed
Hypothesis 2: Entrepreneurial Orientation → Learning Orientation	0.850	44.024	Confirmed
Hypothesis 3: Entrepreneurial Orientation → Coordination Flexibility	0.117	2.148	Confirmed
Hypothesis 4: Learning Orientation → Coordination Flexibility	0.953	19.798	Confirmed
Hypothesis 5: Learning Orientation → Product Innovation	1.275	24.310	Confirmed
Hypothesis 6: Coordination Flexibility → Product Innovation	0.193	4.891	Confirmed
Hypothesis 7: Coordination Flexibility × Resource Flexibility → Product Innovation (Moderation Effect)	0.029	2.396	Confirmed

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this study was to investigate the structural relationships between multiple strategic orientations—specifically entrepreneurial orientation and learning orientation—and product innovation, considering the mediating role of strategic flexibility (i.e., coordination flexibility and resource flexibility) in knowledge-based companies in Kerman. The results confirmed all seven research hypotheses, indicating that entrepreneurial and learning orientations are significant predictors of product innovation, both directly and indirectly, through strategic flexibility mechanisms.

First, the findings revealed a significant and positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and product innovation. This outcome aligns with the extensive literature suggesting that entrepreneurial orientation, characterized by innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking, drives firms

to develop new products and seize emergent market opportunities [1, 3]. This relationship indicates that entrepreneurial firms, even in resource-constrained environments like Iran, can leverage their proactive market behavior and innovation-seeking disposition to generate product-level innovations. The direct impact of entrepreneurial orientation on product innovation reinforces the theoretical claims of the resource-based view, which considers firm-level capabilities such as strategic orientation to be valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate, thus forming the basis of sustained competitive advantage [5].

Moreover, entrepreneurial orientation was found to significantly influence learning orientation and coordination flexibility. The strong positive path coefficient from entrepreneurial to learning orientation suggests that firms that foster entrepreneurial behavior also tend to invest in knowledge acquisition, reflective learning, and organizational learning culture [4]. This confirms the dynamic interaction between these orientations, as proposed in the integrative frameworks of strategic management [7, 8]. Entrepreneurial firms that encourage experimentation and tolerate failure often simultaneously promote organizational learning, thus amplifying their innovation potential [6]. The significant influence of entrepreneurial orientation on coordination flexibility also suggests that such firms are not only visionary but also structurally adaptable—able to orchestrate internal processes and synchronize cross-functional activities in response to strategic needs [5].

In addition, the results demonstrated that learning orientation has a significant positive effect on both coordination flexibility and product innovation. This finding supports earlier research emphasizing the role of learning processes in enhancing a firm's capacity for innovation through continuous capability development and assimilation of external knowledge [2, 4]. Firms that exhibit a strong learning orientation are better positioned to align their internal operations with strategic goals and to adapt to environmental changes. The current findings further reveal that learning orientation strengthens coordination mechanisms, likely because learning promotes shared understanding, knowledge integration, and collective responsiveness—factors critical for operational agility [10]. The direct impact of learning orientation on product innovation is also consistent with the view that knowledge-based competencies are central to sustaining innovation over time, especially in high-velocity industries [9].

The relationship between coordination flexibility and product innovation was also statistically significant, confirming that firms with adaptive and responsive coordination systems are more likely to succeed in developing innovative products. This is in line with prior studies that regard flexibility not just as a buffer against uncertainty but as a strategic enabler of innovation [5, 16]. Coordination flexibility allows firms to reconfigure workflows, realign cross-departmental communication, and swiftly respond to market feedback—all essential conditions for successful product development cycles. Especially for knowledge-based firms, which often operate in rapidly evolving technological sectors, coordination flexibility becomes crucial in integrating expertise, aligning R&D efforts, and accelerating innovation timelines [11].

Furthermore, the moderating role of resource flexibility in the relationship between coordination flexibility and product innovation was statistically significant, though weaker in magnitude. This suggests that while coordination mechanisms are directly tied to innovation outcomes, their effectiveness is enhanced when supported by flexible resource allocation strategies. Resource flexibility enables firms to redeploy human, technological, and financial capital toward new initiatives without compromising ongoing operations. This finding supports the argument that dynamic capabilities—those that allow firms to reconfigure assets and routines—are essential for innovation in turbulent environments [12]. The interaction between these two dimensions of strategic flexibility points to their complementary roles in operationalizing strategic intent.

Notably, the study also confirmed that both coordination flexibility and learning orientation act as mediators in the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and product innovation. This mediation underscores the pathway through which entrepreneurial initiatives translate into innovation outcomes. Entrepreneurial orientation by itself is not sufficient for innovation unless supported by organizational learning and structural responsiveness [1, 6]. Learning orientation facilitates the absorption of new ideas, while coordination flexibility enables their execution across functional units. These findings validate integrated models of strategic orientation, which argue that firm behavior is best explained by the interplay of multiple strategic and structural attributes [7].

The present findings also resonate with regional studies conducted in the Iranian context. Prior work has emphasized that strategic culture, internal marketing, and flexibility play pivotal roles in enhancing the performance of Iranian startups and SMEs [14, 15, 17]. For instance, firms that internalize a result-oriented and strategic mindset, combined

with flexible management structures, tend to outperform their less adaptable counterparts. Similarly, social media activity and customer satisfaction, two proxies for market responsiveness, have been linked to firms' innovation outcomes in Iran [18]. These local insights further reinforce the validity of the current model and provide context-specific evidence for its applicability.

Finally, this research contributes to a growing body of literature that emphasizes the complementarity of strategic orientations and the enabling role of strategic flexibility. It offers empirical support for the notion that innovation is not merely the result of individual strategic traits but rather the outcome of a systemic configuration of orientations and capabilities. This systems-level view is particularly relevant for firms in emerging economies, where environmental volatility necessitates a cohesive and agile strategic posture [11, 13].

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the research sample was limited to knowledge-based companies located in a specific geographic region (Kerman, Iran), which may constrain the generalizability of the findings. The study's cross-sectional design also restricts the ability to draw causal inferences between strategic orientations and innovation outcomes over time. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data through structured questionnaires may introduce response bias or subjectivity in evaluating constructs such as flexibility and innovation. Lastly, while the model incorporated multiple strategic and structural variables, other contextual or environmental factors—such as industry dynamics, government policy, or organizational culture—were not included in the analysis.

Future research can build on this study by conducting longitudinal analyses to explore the temporal evolution of strategic orientations and their effects on innovation. Additionally, comparative studies across different industries or regions could help validate the model in varying institutional contexts. Researchers may also consider incorporating environmental dynamism, digital maturity, or leadership style as moderating variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of strategic configuration. Expanding the methodological approach through mixed methods—such as qualitative case studies or experimental designs—could also deepen insights into how firms operationalize strategic flexibility in practice.

For managers of knowledge-based companies, this study underscores the importance of adopting a balanced strategic approach that integrates both entrepreneurial initiative and organizational learning. Leaders should cultivate a culture that encourages exploration and experimentation while also investing in internal systems that support coordination and knowledge sharing. Developing structural flexibility—both in resource deployment and operational coordination—will be crucial to translating strategic vision into innovation outcomes. Firms should regularly assess and adapt their strategic orientations to remain aligned with external demands and internal capabilities, particularly in rapidly changing and resource-constrained environments.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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